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SUBJECT: ON THE ROAD TO SANTA CRUZ: OAS TECHNICAL WORKSHOP
AND MODEL FOREST FORUM WEIGH SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY, TOURISM
AND AGRICULTURE

1. SUMMARY: On November 2, Regional Environmental Hub Officer (REO) and Regional Environmental Assistant (REA) joined Dan Martinez, Economic Advisor and Alternate Representative for the U.S. Mission to the OAS, Department of Agriculture official Catherine Karr-Colque, and other U.S. delegation members to attend the Organization of American States (OAS) workshop on Sustainable Forestry, Agriculture and Tourism. The session was held at and co-hosted by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) in San Jose. The workshop served as a preparatory meeting for the 2006 Bolivia ministerial meeting on sustainable development. Discussions clustered around three themes: building links across sectors, voluntary initiatives, and innovative financing. Experts present were asked to identify potential areas of cooperation and innovative ideas, as well as to identify specific measures governments could take to foster such cooperation. One such initiative, the Model Forest Global Forum, was showcased November 7-10 at the Tropical Agriculture Center for Research and Teaching (Centro Agronomo Tropical de Investigacion y Ensenanza-CATIE) in Turrialba, Costa Rica. End summary.

Sustainability and the Bolivia 2006 Ministerial

2. The OAS November 2 workshop initiated a preparatory process towards the First Inter-American Ministerial Meeting on Sustainable Development to be hosted in 2006 in Santa Cruz by the Government of Bolivia. The informal, one-day workshop identified useful steps in promoting sustainable agriculture, sustainable forestry and sustainable tourism at policy and project levels for potential areas of cooperation. In his welcoming remarks, Costa Rican Environment Minister Carlos Rodriguez emphasized the challenge of convincing political leaders of the contribution of the environment to the country's GDP. Citing the work of noted writer Jared Diamond, Rodriguez argued ominously that failure to do so jeopardized continued human existence.

3. The freewheeling discussions at the workshop centered on three main clusters: building links across sectors, voluntary initiatives, and innovative financing. The session grappled with defining sustainable forestry, agriculture and forestry; replicating best practices; and incorporating trade and environment concerns in policy. Major obstacles identified by participants included forest fragmentation, lack of integration among economic sectors, and the need to clarify the scope of activities described as "sustainable". A common weakness among environmental management plans was the failure to identify the financial means to implement them, particularly for small and mid-size producers.

4. Co-host Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), which provided the meeting space, delivered an overview of the major agreements reached at its August 2005 Ministerial meeting. Costa Rica provided a thorough explanation of the importance of the country's payment for environmental services program (www.fonafifo.com). Its delegate recommended a strong emphasis on objectives meant to be served by mechanisms, and in taking account of a country's social and economic reality when considering whether to replicate best practices. The U.S. emphasized the importance of incorporating civil society and private partners to this process. The CEC (Commission for Environmental Cooperation) and the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) delegation emphasized the importance of governments' role in promoting access to information, in setting limits to the proliferation of sustainability programs, and to create new markets, among others.

5. The organizers' summation stressed the need to manage ecosystems rather than specific resources, account for financial sustainability from the outset, and flagged marketing challenges. The meeting provided ample opportunity for participants to share experiences, ideas, and creative approaches to integrating forestry, agriculture

and tourism schemes, with civil society participation.

Generating Sustainability: Global Model Forest Forum

16. One relevant approach was highlighted at the November 7-12 commemoration of the International Model Forest Network Secretariat's (IMFNS) 10th anniversary. The celebration

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brought together representatives from 35 model forests in 17 countries. Its objective was to share experiences and recall impacts, challenges and opportunities of their network at local, national, regional and global levels. The IMFNS was established in 1995 in Canada to support the development of a global network of model forests that would foster international exchange of ideas on sustainable forest management. The Secretariat aimed as well to facilitate international cooperation and support ongoing multilevel discussions related to sustainable forest management. The IMFNS carries out its work through site-level support, training, and extension activities; facilitation of networking among model forests; regional, national, and international meetings and workshops; and communications and advocacy.

17. As one of the pillars of sustainable forest management, sustainable economic development is a priority for many resource-dependent communities. Stakeholders of model forests expect an economic dividend, but they need to be able to make informed choices, relying on information on alternate methods, non-traditional resources uses, and more sustainable natural resource extraction processes, among others. The Forum showcased a variety of products from Model Forest projects, from Argentine textiles to Costa Rican nuts and Thai lamps.

18. The term "model forest" was first used in 1991 to describe a program developed by the Government of Canada to develop broad-based voluntary partnerships within large forested landscapes that could translate sustainable forest management policies into practice. The approach to a model forest must be flexible given varying conditions among sites and regions, but all model forest must share six key attributes to encourage program coherence and networking opportunities: an inclusive and dynamic partnership; a commitment to sustainable forest management; a landscape large enough to represent an area's diverse forest uses and values; a governance structure that is representative, participative, transparent, and accountable; a program of activities reflecting partner needs and values; and a commitment to knowledge-sharing and networking on all levels. There are currently 40 model forests in the world, out of which 10 are in Latin America. All three model forests in the United States dropped out of the program three years ago due to funding and coordination problems.

19. Comment. The OAS workshop was billed as the beginning of a process which would continue through a virtual forum and a follow-up meeting in Washington, which would contribute towards the final preparatory meeting leading to the ministerial. Representation at the meeting was broad, but not deep and few NGOs participated. One of the challenges of the OAS discussions is the preparation of a statement that would help guide government efforts on the ground, and efforts at the meeting to build consensus on definitions and common obstacles are steps in that direction. The technical demands of programs like the Model Forest Initiative could be useful in identifying the metrics, enforcement capacity, and economic incentives needed to implement and track future progress. Such guidance could prove particularly valuable for many countries in weighing the potential benefits from sustainable economic activity in the context of proliferating free trade agreements in the Western Hemisphere. End comment.

110. The final report with some possible next steps of the meeting on sustainability in agriculture, forestry and tourism will be included in the website created for the Ministerial Meeting on Sustainable Development in 2006 (http://www.oas.org/osde/MinisterialMeeting/R_eunionInterAm_eng_Wkhp3.htm). For more information on the IMFNS please visit www.imfn.net. For questions or comments please contact Cinthya Alfaro, Environmental Assistant for the Regional Environmental Hub for Central America and the Caribbean, at alfarocg@state.gov, or 506-519-2392.

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